From Novel to Song via Myth:  
*Wuthering Heights* as a Case of Popular Intermedial Adaptation  
[2008]

This paper argues that adaptations of literary works into later, frequently popular, versions of them in other media are rarely cases of direct intermedial transposition but generally pass through a more abstract, essentially media-indifferent stage, which is based on the *Stoff*, or ‘subject matter’, of the literary source rather than on its more essentially ‘literary’ elements. Successful *Stoffe* for intermedial adaptation prove to be fertile towards generating myths or icons, which in turn stimulate further creative responses in various cultural contexts. Yet this successful myth-generating quality of a literary source ultimately rests in a highly literary quality of the source itself, namely in its ability to create a vivid ‘storyworld’ and to guarantee the reader’s ‘immersion’ in this storyworld. Thus, concerning source/target text relationships, critical attention is directed not so much towards the issue of the target text’s ‘fidelity’ to the source, but more so towards the source text’s ‘fertility’ relating to its ‘immersive’, ‘storyworld-building’ and ‘myth-generating’ power. The case is argued by analysing the adaptive process from Emily Brontë’s famous novel *Wuthering Heights* to Kate Bush’s highly successful eponymous popular song of the 1970s.

In 2005, we proudly celebrated four hundred years of Cervantes’s *Don Qui-xote*, which has given critics worldwide ample opportunity to contemplate the reception history of this extraordinary book. In a perceptive *Times Literary Supplement* review, Jeremy Lawrance observed that “the book’s recognition as a world classic goes back to the eighteenth century and its status as world myth to the nineteenth”. He added that various “forms of repackaging” of the novel (such as various “curios” from comic strips to “Quixotic cookery”) have “spared [us] the trouble of reading a thousand-page Spanish Baroque novel” (Lawrance 2005).

I take the cue for my discussion of Emily Brontë’s novel *Wuthering Heights* and its afterlife in adaptation from this comment, and from another one made by a clever journalist who described a classic novel as “a timeless read that I never have time to read” (Online 1). As we are concerned with Word and Music
Studies, the example and case of adaptation by which I have chosen to demonstrate my views is a musical one, namely Kate Bush’s extremely successful song of 1978, called “Wuthering Heights”. What I plan to develop, however, is a more general reflection on adaptive processes from literary texts into popular media and – to indicate one of my main points right at the start – to demonstrate that such intermedial transpositions are often processes which do not involve a direct transformation from one medium into another, but rather tend to pass through a stage of a far more abstract, essentially extra-medial condition.

*Kate Bush, “Wuthering Heights”*

Out on the wiley and windy moors  
We’d roll and fall in green.  
You had a temper like my jealousy:  
Too hot, too greedy.  
How could you leave me,  
When I needed to possess you?  
I hated you. I loved you, too.  

Bad dreams in the night.  
You told me I was going to lose the fight,  
Leave behind my wuthering, wuthering  
Wuthering Heights.  

Heathcliff, it’s me, your Cathy, I’ve come home. I’m so cold,  
Let me in at your window.  

Ooh, it gets dark! It gets lonely,  
On the other side from you.  

I pine a lot. I find a lot  
Falls through without you.  
I’m coming back, love.  
Cruel Heathcliff, my one dream,  
My only master.  

Too long I roam in the night.  
I’m coming back to his side, to put it right.  
I’m coming home to wuthering, wuthering,  
Wuthering Heights.